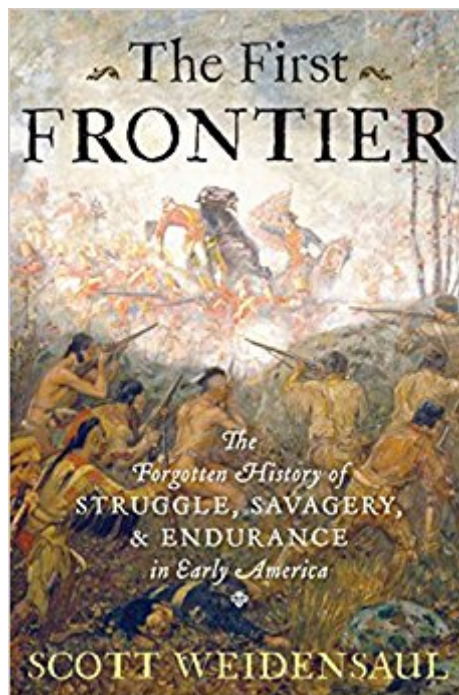




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# The First Frontier: The Forgotten History Of Struggle, Savagery, And Endurance In Early America



## Synopsis

Frontier: the word carries the inevitable scent of the West. But before Custer or Lewis and Clark, before the first Conestoga wagons rumbled across the Plains, it was the East that marked the frontier—the boundary between complex Native cultures and the first colonizing Europeans. Here is the older, wilder, darker history of a time when the land between the Atlantic and the Appalachians was contested ground—when radically different societies adopted and adapted the ways of the other, while struggling for control of what all considered to be their land. The First Frontier traces two and a half centuries of history through poignant, mostly unheralded personal stories—like that of a Harvard-educated Indian caught up in seventeenth-century civil warfare, a mixed-blood interpreter trying to straddle his white and Native heritage, and a Puritan woman wielding a scalping knife whose bloody deeds still resonate uneasily today. It is the first book in years to paint a sweeping picture of the Eastern frontier, combining vivid storytelling with the latest research to bring to life modern America's tumultuous, uncertain beginnings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The paired terms of frontier and Indian often conjure up images of cavalry troops and eagle-feather-bonneted Sioux or Cheyenne warriors struggling across buffalo-laden plains. As this exciting and revealing chronicle shows, the original frontier was in the East, stretching from the tidewater to the foothills of the Appalachians, and from Maine to Florida. Weidensaul, an author and naturalist, provides a stirring panorama of the land and the peoples who made their mark on it from the late sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The land is described, in detail, as lush and enticing, but it

was a lushness that could kill when it turned harsh and violent. Across this landscape, Weidensaul tracks the diverse and complicated mix of humanity who cooperated, fought, and transformed it, including various Huron, Iroquoian, and Algonquian Native American groupings and French-, English-, and German-speaking Europeans. This is a rich tableau that both excites and informs about the forging of early American society. --Jay Freeman

“With a novelist’s flair, he conveys the experiences of ordinary people pitted against powerful and unpredictable nature. . . Mr. Weidensaul invites readers to imagine the bloody ground beneath modern America’s apparently tame landscape.”  
•The Wall Street Journal  
“Exhaustively researched and entertainingly written. . . Credit Weidensaul with proving once again that history does not have to be dull in order to be comprehensive. It would be difficult to find a work of either fact or fiction more filled with excitement and suspense than *The First Frontier*.”  
•The Seattle Times  
“With a novelist’s flair, he conveys the experiences of ordinary people pitted against powerful and unpredictable nature. . . Mr. Weidensaul invites readers to imagine the bloody ground beneath modern America’s apparently tame landscape.”  
•The Wall Street Journal

Most Americans think of the west when they think of the frontier but the author of "The First Frontier" rightly reminds his readers that there was a much earlier frontier in what is now the eastern part of the United States. As should be expected with any single book on such a vast subject, the author touches only lightly on many important events during the long history of the eastern frontier. This book deals largely with the relationships and warfare between the Indians and the Colonists. Most of the book I found to be well-written in a highly readable style. The section dealing with American pre-history I found to be a bit too lengthy given that it consists largely of speculation since little is actually known with any degree of certainty. The author deals with the early conflicts in the southern colonies and those in what would become the New England states. The focus is almost entirely on the Pennsylvania frontier for the portion of the book dealing with the French and Indian War. Strangely enough, given its relative size and importance during the period, the New York frontier is almost entirely ignored. The book ends with a brief mention of Pontiac’s Rebellion and the looming Revolutionary War. Overall a good, though selective, introduction to the Eastern Frontier.

Conrad Weiser (1696-1760), who is buried some two miles from my home, is one of a number of historic characters who bring life to this amazing book. Others include Hannah Duston, who went on

her own personal warpath killing and scalping of her Indian captors in her escape. Robert Stobo, a British officer who provided General Braddock needed information before the disaster during the French and Indian (Seven Years') War and who survived death by the French and Indians so often, killed himself in a drunken stupor. George Washington and Benjamin Franklin are given their times on stage. Many children of the early settlers were captured and lost their English or German languages. Some were Amish and Quakers. After years they did not want to leave their Native American lives and adoptive families to return to their birth families. The author explains much important trivia such as wampum and the origin of buck (for a dollar). This is a wild and wide-ranging book. It unites, details, and clarifies such items as the recent finding of the 9,300 year old remains of the Kennewick Man on the shores of the Columbia River and the Basque cod fisherman and Vikings who were familiar with these eastern Atlantic shores long before Columbus set foot in the New World. This is a very important and never dry read which is a continuous page-turner. The illustrations and maps are most helpful. It should nest in most public libraries. The book is well-documented. It sets the stage for the American Revolution.

Having read several of Scott Weidensaul's books, both history and natural history, I think his writing just keeps getting better. He takes a complex subject and draws the reader in. Even if history, the early history of our country, isn't your thing you'll find something to like about this book. I heard Mr Weidensaul do a reading from this book at a local bookstore and I was captivated. He approaches history and tells it as a story, a story of real people and their lives. You'll find much here that isn't in the history books. Living in Pennsylvania, where many of the incidents in this book occurred, I found there was much I didn't know. Don't be tempted to disregard this as fluff. Weidensaul is a Pulitzer Prize nominated author (for "Living on the Wind") and is meticulous about his research whether it be historical or scientific. If you are looking for a solidly researched, well-written book about the first American frontier I doubt that you'd find a better one than Weidensaul's.

Scott Weidensaul has given us a harrowing account of the way the first British settlements in North America took land from the Native American who lived there. They did it variously by purchase, deceit, and force, and it is not a pretty story -- although it was probably inevitable. It involved a series of little wars that led eventually to a global conflict. When it was over the French were expelled from the continent and the original inhabitants pushed out of the Appalachians into Ohio and Kentucky. Some of this has been told before--in Nathaniel Philbrick's MAYFLOWER and in histories of the French and Indian War. Weidensaul has given us a complete, balanced account.

Along the way he has acquainted us with land agents, scouts, and frontiersmen--many of them with wonderful stories--we wouldn't have met before.

At first I was thinking of giving this book only a four star rating at best, but as I wrote this review I had to add the extra star. My first inclination is to say the writing style is bit disjointed and the subject matter as not fully covered, but a deeper appraisal shows these are not flaws at all. The work does not seem to do a good a job of telling the history of the first frontier. What it does cover at first seems to be done in a stop-start manner. As you get into the story you see that is done with the intention of showing the reader the complexity of the bigger picture. This history will not give you a full and complete view of the European inroads into the continent. What it will do is tell the story of many of the individuals that were involved in those events. In fact this is the one point that makes this book such a good read. As a teacher of history I have often told my students not to look at history as a group of disjointed group of dates and events but to see them as the story of the people involved therein. Scott Weidensaul did just that in this work. If you want a comprehensive list of the events that transpired from roughly 1500 the 1770, then you might want to look elsewhere. If you want to see the history of the two centuries of the European-Native interaction in America this is the book for you.

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